

Washington, D.C. — Congressman Sestak, Vice Chairman of the Small Business Committee, today successfully worked to have voted out of committee The Veterans' Programs Act of 2007 to provide veterans entrepreneurial development programs, helping veterans transition out of the armed services and provide additional assistance to helping women veterans open businesses. A former three-star Admiral, Congressman Sestak also voted today on the House floor for bills honoring and supporting America's veterans.

"Our men and women in uniform have served our country courageously and performed brilliantly – just as they always do," said Congressman Sestak. "These new bills honor those who have fallen, provide for who are injured in our ongoing conflicts overseas, and benefit those who have finished their service with honor."

The bill passed today in the Small Business committee, The Veterans' Programs Act of 2007 (H.R. 2366), requires that two new Veteran Business Outreach Centers open in 2008 and 2009 to help veterans pursue or resume business activities after they leave service. It also requires a special outreach to veterans through the Department of Labor's Transition Assistance Program workshops.

The bills passed today in the House:

- Expand eligibility for vocational rehabilitation benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. This allows current members of the armed forces who are hospitalized, receiving outpatient care, or disabled while on active duty to receive rehabilitation benefits.
- Direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide improvements in the treatment of individuals with traumatic brain injuries. This bill authorizes new research centers for traumatic brain injuries and requires the establishment of a comprehensive program to treat traumatic brain injuries at Veterans Administration hospitals. It also establishes a program to screen veterans for brain injuries and creates a pilot program of mobile centers to aid with readjustment counseling. This was particularly important to Congressman Sestak who saw the real-life need for this several weeks ago when he visited with six marines at Bethesda Naval Hospital, five of whom were recovering from traumatic brain injuries. This bill provides \$30 million through fiscal year 2011 to support research, education, and training at five centers for traumatic brain injury treatment.
- Require the provision of chiropractic care and services to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers to be carried out at no fewer than 75 medical centers by December 31, 2009 and at all medical centers by December 31, 2011.
- Extend from two years to five years following discharge or release the eligibility period for veterans who served in combat during or after the Persian Gulf War to receive hospital care, medical services, or nursing home care provided by the Veterans Affairs Department.

- Directs the Veterans Affairs Department to provide assistance to states for outreach to veterans and their families. The outreach should inform veterans about benefits and programs for which they are eligible and help them in applying.
- Encourage Americans to visit American Cemeteries and Memorials.
- Direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in southern Colorado.

Since he has been in Congress, Congressman Sestak has been fighting for the men and women who have served and who are currently serving in our armed forces. He successfully passed two amendments to H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which will improve mental health care for our wounded soldiers. The first amendment highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that 'medical care' as defined in H.R. 1538 includes mental health care services.

The second amendment requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program's research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service members. Both amendments passed with unanimous support.

Congressman Sestak also supported the Defense Authorization Bill, which provided funds for a number of important provisions for military personnel and veterans.

The Defense Authorization Bill:

- Prohibits increases in soldier health and retiree TRICARE and pharmacy user fees, which the Administration proposed to do in the midst of a war
- Authorizes a monthly payment of \$40 a month for surviving spouses who are denied the full amount of their Survivor Benefit Plan because of concurrently receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- Allows returning service personnel to authorize the Defense Department to provide their medical and health information to the Veterans Affairs Department.
- Provides resources that take care of our service members and their families by authorizing a 3.5% across-the-board pay raise (.5% above the Administration's proposal) for all service

members, which reduces the pay gap between the military and private sector to 3.4%.

Congressman Sestak also voted in the FY 2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill to provide \$1.8 billion for veterans' medical care. In addition, in the FY 2008 budget, he voted to strengthen our national defense and honor our promises to our brave troops and veterans by providing the largest increase for veterans' health care in the history of our country – \$3.6 billion more than the President's budget and more than \$30 billion above the President over five years. This will help to ensure that the 1,145,918 veterans in Pennsylvania receive care worthy of their sacrifice.

"As someone who wore the uniform, few things are more important to me than our obligation to support our veterans," said Sestak. "The needs of our veterans vary greatly, from who fought in World War II to those who are serving now in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The bills I supported today and over the past few months address their needs and honor the sacrifices of our servicemen and women and their families."

Congressman Sestak is a former three-star Admiral in the U.S. Navy and is the highest ranked officer ever elected to Congress.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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